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## POLITICAL HISTORY IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL.

POLITICAL history has to do with that phase of institutional life which centers around government. Government is one of the five fundamental institutions in which human thought and feeling are embodied. The other fundamental institutions are the church, the school, industry, and the family. There seems to have been a time when the family was the one undifferentiated center out of which and into which all institutional activity flowed. In the course of time, and probably at long intervals, one after another, the other institutions began to appear, and in time became sufficiently separated in organization and function to be looked upon as institutions in themselves. Notwithstanding wide differences in organization, these five institutions are the parts of one organism. In a sense they are not only fundamental, but co-ordinate, parts of human society. The political organ, however, has this peculiarity, that it has been set apart, by the experience of ages, as the regulative part. Government establishes the relations of the various institutions to one another, and the conduct of individuals in relation to institutions and to each other. This function of government gives it a sort of primacy among the other institutions. Indeed, historical students have been so impressed with the importance of political history that they have declared that "history is past politics." The history of government—political history—judged by its logical relations to the other phases of institutional life, is a subject of first importance.

Educational values, however, are not solely determined by logical relations. Hence, the relations which political history sustains to the other phases of history cannot be the sole principle of selection and emphasis in history work. The relation which the facts of history bear to the ability and experience of the learning mind is a principle of paramount importance, especially in the grades below the high school. Ignorance of this principle,

or failure to give it proper weight, explains much of the blundering committed by very high authorities in history when bestowing their wisdom on the history teachers of the elementary school.

From the nature of government and of the functions it must carry out, the facts of political history are, as a rule, farther removed from the early experiences of children than are the facts of industrial and social life. The child is born in the midst of a family, and before he reaches school has formed many simple conceptions, and carries in mind many concrete pictures and experiences drawn from family life. The simple and obvious relations existing among the members of the family are fairly clear to him. He himself assumes a different attitude toward father, mother, brother, and sister. By the age of six he has, in fact, pushed his observation of social affairs and relations far beyond his immediate family. He carries to his first school a corresponding knowledge of industrial affairs. He knows some of the occupations of his community, and how they are related to one another and to his own needs. In a less degree, too, he has gathered matter touching the church and the school. These four sorts of activities go on around him and immediately touch his experience in many ways. This knowledge, of course, is more or less unconsciously acquired, but it is none the less valuable material, out of which he will later reconstruct the history of the great past.

During the pre-school period the child's opportunity to learn about political affairs is much more limited, and his experience with them is much less direct, than is the case with the other kinds of neighborhood activities. He may see policemen or other governmental officers, and may even participate, in his way, in a city or national campaign. Nevertheless, these objects and events, and the things for which they stand, are less familiar and farther removed from his experience. Some of them come to him only at great intervals of time.

This unconscious process of getting first-hand knowledge of the great phases of active life go on in about the same way, and without much disturbance of the ratio of emphasis, for the first few school years. But somewhere in the primary grades

comes the study of home geography, which includes, as one of its phases, the study of what man does in the community. From the point of view of the teacher of history, this is a most excellent preparation for the study of history, because in his own neighborhood the pupil will find in concrete action those five fundamental phases which make up the life developed in history. In this study of home geography the pupil, as a rule, begins that emphasis upon government and its machinery which, by the aid of teachers and text-book makers, he keeps up as long as he studies history. There is no good reason, however, drawn either from the nature of the different phases of life studied or from the stage of the pupil's mental development, why any emphasis should be placed upon the political phase at this stage of the study. Although there is no sound reason why emphasis should now be placed upon the study of government, the cause of such emphasis is not far to seek. The teacher who does the work and the superintendent who constructs the course of study very naturally carry their own knowledge of history, obtained in high schools, normal schools, or colleges, into the grades. This is predominantly political history. Again, the text-books on American history are largely devoted to political history. The result naturally follows.

This study of the institutional activity of man in the pupil's own community is not history in the ordinary sense of that term, yet it is one of the best preparations for the study of real history that could be made. If we now advance with the child to his first study of the past, we discover that the material which takes deepest hold on his life and creates in him a love of history is not drawn from the field of political history. The only important exception is found in military history. But military events are so remotely connected with political events that the child in this stage of growth sees little or no connection between them. Story-writers, understanding the child's interest in adventure and his appreciation of the heroes, have chosen explorers and warriors as the central figures of their stories. Jane Andrews's *Ten Boys*, the stories of Greek and Roman heroes, McMurtry's *Pioneer Stories*, and others are drawn from other fields than political history. John Smith and Nathaniel Bacon furnish better material

for stories than Governors Yeardley and Berkeley, Miles Standish than Governor Bradford, and George Washington the surveyor and warrior than George Washington the president and statesman.

In the transition from the history story to the history text the pupil comes upon matter which is predominantly political. The older grammar-school histories confined themselves almost exclusively to political events or to events which grew directly out of political movements. This was overemphasis. Although the modern grammar-school histories are better balanced, they still give more attention to political events than to either of the other great phases of life, and probably more than is desirable. There is not only an explanation, but a justification, in part, of the present position of political history in our best school texts. The new history places emphasis upon continuity in historical growth. This includes not only the tracing of the continuous succession of related events, but also the tracing of the continuous life-history of great ideas. Because of the nature of political history and of the relation of government to the other great institutions, its events and ideas are not only more obtrusive, but run out, as it were, and relate themselves to a wider range of interests than those of any other phase of history. Therefore the writer of history texts finds it possible to use most readily political ideas and movements as centers for the organization of his facts. The period of the American Revolution is a most excellent illustration of this point. The struggle for the rights of Englishmen sweeps in the great majority of events from 1760 to 1775, and the struggle for the rights of man those from 1775 to 1783. From 1783 to 1789 the important events cluster around the struggle for a stronger national government. The history from 1789 to 1860 is almost as well organized by the struggle between democracy and nationality and slavery and nationality. The above is a partial explanation of the reason why political history occupies so prominent a place in our grammar schools. What is the justification? The preceding explanation is, in part, a justification. If history is in character what is indicated above, then it must be so studied to arrive at a true view of it. A

second argument which may be urged is found in the fact that the pupil in the last years of the grammar school, especially the boys, begin to have a deepened interest in politics, and in questions relating to government, than ever before. They have reached a stage of growth which enables them to understand political questions more fully than before. A third reason may be found in the fact that so great a percentage of pupils end their school career with the grammar school. No opportunity, therefore, should be lost in the effort to make them acquainted with the spirit and functions of the government of our country. Thus far no means have been devised for this end so efficient as the systematic study of the origin and progress of that government as revealed in the progressive development of American history.

If there is any conclusion to this discussion, it is that in the first five or six years of school life, when the rapid transitions of the child's powers is the source of authority as to procedure, the study of non-political history should be emphasized; and that in the last two years of the grammar school, where the degree of mental strength permits the logical relations of the subject more and more to dictate procedure, political history should take precedence.

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